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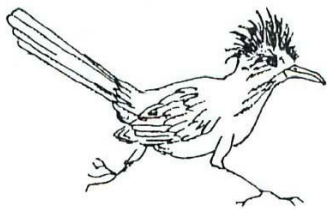
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Season 3, Volume 6

Big Bend National Park's Volunteer Newsletter

April 2004



★★★★★★★★★★★★★
 ★ The Fourth Annual ★
 ★ Volunteer ★
 ★ Appreciation ★
 ★ Banquet ★
 ★ sponsored by BBNHA ★
 ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★



CURRENT VOLUNTEERS

PERSIMMON GAP

Mark Kirtley; Interpretation; returning
 Joan and Jack Lamkin; Interpretation; returning

RIO GRANDE VILLAGE

Barbara and Bill Baldwin- Campground Hosts ;
 returning
 Sue and Bob Hostetter- Campground Hosts; new
 Denise and John Curd- Interpretation; new
 Gail and John Kamaras- Interpretation; returning

CHISOS BASIN

Dori and Tom Ramsay- Interpretation; returning
 Sally and Bob Jones- Campground Hosts; returning
 Clara and George Willis- Campground Hosts; returning

CASTOLON

Whitney Hibbard and Samantha Schroeder-
 Backcountry and Campground Host; returning
 Nancy Daniel- Interpretation; new;
 Norma and Lloyd Burgi- Interpretation; returning

PANTHER JUNCTION

Allison Taylor- Interpretation; new; SCA
 Bob Herendeen- Interpretation; new; SCA
 Hemant Vankawala- Protection; Doctor; new



Spring 2004 Volunteers at Big Bend National Park

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION BANQUET

More than thirty special VIPs were recognized at the Volunteer Awards Banquet which was held on March 25, 2004 in the Panther Junction Community Room. This year approximately half of the volunteers were recognized for their many hours of volunteer service with special awards. Barbara and Bill Baldwin, volunteering over 11,000 hours, and Joan and Jack Lamkin, over 6,000 hours, were given extra special recognition for the extensive number of years of dedicated service to Big Bend National Park. Both couples were awarded special National Park Service Arrowhead Watches. Next time you see them, ask them what time it is! Mark Kirtley, Tom and Dori Ramsay, Les and Dana Over, Kay and Rich Gordon, Steve Harper, Scarlett and Bob Wirt were awarded *ATTACHE CASES* for giving three or more years of service to the NPS. Returning volunteers awarded *PEN AND PENCIL SETS* for volunteering over 500 hours of service were Gail and John Kamaras, Norma and Lloyd Burgi, Whit Hibbard and Samantha Schroeder.

All volunteers received NPS certificates, pins and BBNP pins. In addition, individuals volunteering for 200 hours or more received NPS mugs and individuals with 300 hours or more of service received special 2004 T-Shirts and a \$15 BBNHA gift certificate.

Special thanks go out to Mike Boren and the Big Bend

Natural History Association for graciously hosting and sponsoring the awards banquet again this year. We would also like to thank Gail Shugart, Pam Keyes and Martha King for decorating the room (it looked lovely!) and to Casa Grande for donating the drinks. The supervisors of the VIPs and SCAs provided words of encouragement and inspiration. It was a wonderful evening and one that was memorable in every respect.



Basin Hosts

depart before the Banquet, so they celebrate at Dave Yim's a few days early.

Well Mapping



Bob Wirt, a third year ScRM volunteer has a unique job this season. He is mapping all the old wells in the park. What does this mean? It means that he goes to all the known sites that have wells and does several things. One, he locates it on a map using a Global Position System (GPS) and records information on a data sheet that describes the

site and what is located there. Secondly, he photographs the sites for future reference taking in as much of the well site as possible. Thirdly, he checks to see if there is any water at the well site. This he can do several ways; one is by checking records before going out to determine if there is a written record on the production of water at the site. Most of the wells do not have any historic data associated with them. He can also lower a tape that measures how deep the well is and the depth of the water.

Why is this important you ask? In the first place, this information will help with visitor and employee safety. Some of these wells are not covered or capped. Also, the park does not have a comprehensive map showing all the wells in the park. This infor-



La Loma Windmill,
North Rosillos

mation is vital to the overall management of the resources in the park.

So far Bob has documented over 89 wells and might exceed 100 by the time he leaves in mid-April to go back home. How does he do it? He does it the old fashioned way, he hikes to the site or he might drive to the site. A majority of the time, he has hiked to the site. On several occasions, the hikes to get to one well site was all day. Some other sites required $\frac{3}{4}$ of a day and some were much easier and required a few hours hike. Along the way, Bob documented anything else that might interest resource management including historic sites, cemeteries, old corrals, etc.

Hiking out there, he has seen some of the most beautiful country in the park and enjoyed every minute of it. Our thanks and appreciation goes out to Bob for his hard work and dedication to finishing this first comprehensive map of all the well sites in the park.



Double Windmills
North Rosillos



Lower CCC Well

GAIL AND JOHN KAMARAS

Gail and John first visited Big Bend National Park four years ago as campers with their fifth wheel rig. They had heard about the park from "The Escapees", a national RV organization to which about half of the RV owners belong. After spending a couple of weeks here as campers, they knew this was the place where they wanted to volunteer and to "give back", so they signed up for the following year as VIPs.

John and Gail currently reside in Tallahassee, Florida, although most of their adult and professional lives were spent in Albany, New York. As a licensed Methodist minister, John has voluntarily conducted weekly ecumenical Sunday services at the Rio Grande Village Campground Amphitheater since he has been on the staff. He is also a psychologist and was director of pastoral care at a hospice before he retired. Gail has always had a concern for environmental issues. After working ten years as a librarian, and volunteering for environmental organizations, she decided to find a way to be more effective in helping this cause. Pursuing a second career, she attended law school and began working as a lawyer for the New York State Department of En-



vironmental Conservation. When John and Gail left New York for Florida in 1995, she then worked for a non-profit environmental agency, LEAF.

This is the second year that the Kamaras have been here as volunteers and they like how they have been treated as a part of the park's staff. John is an amateur photographer and a part of his collection of cacti flowers and wildflowers was added to the park's website last year. He is also in the process of getting his second license as a ham radio operator, which is a skill that he has acquired since he retired.

John and Gail have developed and conduct a "living history" program which features Hot Springs developer, J. O. Langford (a.k.a. John) and rancher Hallie Stillwell (a.k.a. Gail). John credits Gail with doing the great majority of the historical research and homework required to give the program substance and life. All staff are encouraged to visit this interpretive program and to meet these two "living legends."

John and Gail plan to return to the park this fall as volunteers so they can see the park and desert environment during another season of the year. We certainly look forward to their return and thank them for all they contribute to the park and our community.



Marfa and the Marfa Ghost Lights-

Marfa is the seat of Presidio County and home of a beautifully renovated stone and brick courthouse originally opened in 1886. Just a few yards away is the Hotel Paisano where presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy and other dignitaries stayed. The hotel was the home of Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson, James Dean, Dennis Hopper, and others who appeared in the film classic, *Giant*, which was shot nearby. Inside the hotel lobby there are glass-fronted cases of *Giant* memorabilia including numerous newspaper clippings, clippings from *Life* magazine and other accounts of the film shoot.



Downtown Marfa also features a truly elegant Italian restaurant called Maiya's, which has a complete wine list, a bar, and dinners that can feature cucumber soup and a salad of roasted beets and gorgonzola dressing. Readers are cautioned about the prices appearing on the menu which are listed as tiny, miniscule numbers like "22", "11". The writer had one half of a baked chicken, roasted squash and a glass of merlot for \$28.00. The service was excellent, the food was equally good and presented in a very tasteful way, though a little pricey, you won't be disappointed. It is worth a visit.

A traveler cannot visit Marfa without mentioning the ghost lights which were reported for the first time in 1836 by a cowboy riding his horse on a nearby prairie. Since then, hundreds of sightings have been documented, books and articles have been written about them, yet the phenomena of the lights cannot be explained. As described by Judith M. Brueske, Ph.D.

in "The Marfa Lights" publication (Ocotillo Enterprises; Alpine Printing Co., Alpine, TX.; 1989), "The lights are most often reported as rather distant bright lights distinguishable from ranch lights and automotive headlights.. primarily by their aberrant movements. The lights are reported to appear and disappear and to veer off suddenly in odd directions.. They have the ability to divide and merge and to change colors, although white is the most common color....." Another reported "one light... was the largest. It would seem to flicker like a ball of fire the shoot up into the sky, and at times it would go right and the other part would go left. It seemed to, at times, have an essence of a soft, greenish-blue color quickly changing to a red. It would also move from left to right and back again in addition to splitting apart and moving to the right." (p.7)

Readers are urged to draw their own conclusions about the lights. A favorite viewing area is on Highway 90, about nine miles east of Marfa. This location is known as Pisano Pass to the east and Mitchell Flat to the south. This place is labeled as "an official Marfa lights viewing site" and a sign to that effect is posted along the highway. In recent years, a rest stop complete with bathrooms, maps and pictures has been built for the comfort of travelers and viewers.

Finally, Marfa has a world class collection of minimalist

modern art at the Donald Judd Museum. All in all, Marfa is a very interesting town to visit with a variety of things for visitors to discover.



INTERVIEW WITH KEN FIELDS AND NANCY DICKERSON,

This has been Nancy Dickerson and Ken Fields first season as back country volunteers at Rio Grande Village. They had been to Big Bend National Park a year ago and they knew what to expect from the park as far as the weather, the people, and the local flora and fauna were concerned. One of their expectations though, was to conduct backcountry horse patrols as their volunteer job assignment. Unfortunately, the horse they were supposed to ride, "Lefty", had a bad back and a bad attitude from being alone all the time. So, right when Nancy and Ken started their assignment, Lefty was shipped out to Castolon to be with other horses. A confiscated smuggler's truck, with a false bed for stashing drugs, took Lefty's place. Nicknamed the "Stealth", it was not exactly the kind of vehicle you could use to conduct unobtrusive patrols in the backcountry. The one time Nancy and Ken did get to ride horses was during a "round up" of wild horses and mules who had migrated to the park from Mexico and were illegally grazing on NPS land. The rounded up animals were eventually sold at an auction to the highest bidder for resettlement to a permanent "foster home". The "Stealth" was not used for the round-up (surprise, surprise).



Both Ken and Nancy have backgrounds in law enforce-

ment, indeed they met each other at a computer course for law enforcement personnel. In fact, Ken was able to share some of his computer expertise during his time here by helping integrate one of the programs used to report case incidents.

Ken and Nancy were campground hosts at Yellowstone National Park last summer. After finishing here at the end of March, they were taking a couple of weeks off to visit family and friends in southern California. Nancy was especially excited to dote on her first grandson who was born on December 4th. Then they planned to go to New Mexico for a rustic cattle drive, before taking a cruise to the Panama Canal. This fall, they will be working at Zion National Park.

Both Ken and Nancy admit that Big Bend is "one of the best kept secrets" in the National Park System. They feel happy that the park is blessed with wonderful, friendly people and that there is a great sense of community among the people who are a part of the Big Bend family. They are proud to have been a small part of it during the winter/spring of 2004.



AMERICAN YOUTH WORKS TACKLE BIG BEND'S BUFFELGRASS



On March 23, 2004, members of the American Youth Works from Austin met with park botanist, Joe Sirot-nak, to help with probably the single largest threat to the Chihuahuan Desert Ecosystem, the exotic buffelgrass.

Exotic plants and animals, introduced

species not indigenous to an area, can compete more successfully for resources in their new environment than their native counterparts because they have no direct predators. Once established, they choke out native vegetation, taking over an area, becoming a threat to the biodiversity and ecological integrity of the landscape. Buffelgrass, a native of Sub-Saharan Africa, was cultivated for its ability to survive in harsh desert environments. It probably gained a foothold in the park in the 1970's when the seeds of the plant entered the park from the underside of cars. "The grass easily establishes anywhere there is a slight depression for rain encatchment; it also does well in washes and along roadsides." "Several core habitats for threatened cactus species are being invaded by buffelgrass."

Eleven young men and women joined Joe in digging

up the grass, making sure to get all of the roots, for four hours on the 23rd. The American Youth Works is an Austin-based affiliate of the Americorps. It is a non-profit organization where youth, ages 17-28, volunteer for six months to two years with different projects throughout the city. Most of the projects they have been working on are building low income housing with 'green' or environmentally safe materials. Additionally, they have assisted in building and maintaining trails in the city and neighboring county parks. Although, this trip to Big Bend was a fun field trip, they still were interested in volunteering to help the park in any way. We thank them and all the other volunteers who help Joe work toward preserving this delicate ecosystem.



Where in the Big Bend World Are We?

John Curd was so excited to win last month's 'Boot Contest', that he and Denise designed another contest for your pleasure. The Curds are donating the **First Prize of a \$50.00 gift certificate to True Value in Alpine.** All you have to do is match the pictures to their locations and turn your answers in to Angelina by May 1. Only one entry per person please. This contest is open to volunteers and staff alike. Remember, if you aren't in you can't win!

Here are your answer choices,
mark the correct number or
name beside each picture.

- 1 Tuff Canyon
- 2 Black Gap Rd.
- 3 Sam Nail Ranch

- 4 Paint Gap Hills
- 5 Boot Canyon
- 6 Persimmon Peak
- 7 Fossil Bone Exhibit
- 8 Marufa Vega Trail
- 9 McKinney Spring

- 10 Rio Grande Visitor Center
- 11 Glenn Spring
- 12 Hot Springs Trail
- 13 Croton Peak
- 14 Grape Vine Hills
- 15 Telephone Canyon

- 16 Laguna Meadows Trail
- 17 River Road East
- 18 Old Ore Road
- 19 Homer Wilson Ranch
- 20 Rice Tank

Your Name:

